

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 18, 2011

Agenda Item: Fish Creek Hard-rock Mineral Rights Acquisition (Region 2, Mineral County)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to acquire the hard-rock mineral rights (HRMR) for 29,488 acres of its 40,807-acre Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area and State Park (Fish Creek Property). The acquisition will add to FWP's current ownership of approximately 5,500 acres of HRMR on the Fish Creek Property (the other 5,957 acres is retained by the federal government). The landscape is important for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, mountain lion, black bear, wolves and furbearers. Fish Creek and its tributaries support the strongest runs of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout within the 120-mile reach of the middle Clark Fork watershed, with many of its streams also supporting genetically pure, resident westslope cutthroat trout. The Fish Creek drainage is a high priority for forest carnivore linkage, connecting populations from the Cabinet Range, Mission Mountains, and the Ninemile Divide to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Acquisition of the HRMR would ensure that no mineral exploration and/or extraction activities occur on the majority of the Fish Creek Property, thus meeting many of the objectives for which the Department originally purchased the property. CR Montana Corporation is interested in selling its HRMR as an alternative to exploring and/or mining the Fish Creek Property. Acquisition funding would come from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program in the amount of approximately \$150,000 (pending negotiations).

Public Involvement Process & Results

This opportunity has received strong support from members of the public, hunting and fishing organizations, and conservation groups. Of the 15 comments received by 10 individuals and five agencies or organizations, 87 percent supported the acquisition, including the Mineral County Commissioners.

Alternatives and Analysis

CR Montana Corporation would likely continue to research other selling options and potential buyers for its HRMR. Mineral exploration and/or extraction could be developed by the company or another party, which could jeopardize wildlife, fish, and recreation resource values.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

If completed, the Fish Creek Property HRMR acquisition would ensure that no future mineral exploration and/or extraction activities occur under 85 percent of the Fish Creek Property; therefore, protecting an ecologically significant area.

Proposed Motion

Move that the Commission approve FWP's proposal to purchase the HRMR under the Fish Creek WMA and Fish Creek State Park.